8-1993

Confucian Orthodoxy meets ESL: Teaching Across Academic Cultures

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These starred papers submitted by Patrick Dunham in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts are hereby approved by the final research committee.

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CONFUCIAN ORTHODOXY MEETS ESL: TEACHING ACROSS ACADEMIC CULTURES

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USING COMPLIMENTS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM: AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURE AND GENDER

by

Patrick Dunham
B.S., St. Cloud State University, 1983

Starred Papers
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of
St. Cloud State University
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

> "From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person as the root of everything besides."
> Confucius (Legge, vol. 1, p. 359)

The historical and cultural developments of China, in particular the ancient precepts articulated by Confucian orthodoxy, serve as a lasting cultural influence for a billion and half people throughout China and Taiwan (Chance, 1987; Yang, 1970), Japan (Rohlen, 1983; Singleton, 1967), Korea (Robinson, 1991), and Vietnam (Erbaugh, 1990). Confucian orthodoxy has been instrumental in shaping the philosophy of education throughout East Asia for nearly twenty five hundred years. The teachings of China's Great Sage, Confucius, and the subsequent body of literature produced throughout the centuries by many of his infamous disciples, referred to as the Confucian classics, have had a principal role in shaping the underlying philosophy of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean education (Oliver, 1971; Carson, 1992). This philosophy, in contrast to Western educational tradition, formally shaped by the philosophy of the ancient Greeks, is fundamentally different in methodology, teaching

techniques, and classroom practice as compared to the West (White, 1987; Erbaugh, 1990).

For the East Asian student entering the classroom of an American university these differences in educational philosophy, and subsequent classroom practice, can cause a peculiar and unexpected kind of culture shock referred to as "academic culture shock" (Cleverly, 1985; Robinson, 1990). This cross-cultural academic shock stems from the contrasting perceptions of the East Asian student and the American-trained teacher concerning the educational process. For example, substantial research shows that East Asians are oriented toward indirect, or circular patterns of communication, whereas communication patterns in the United States emphasizes more of a direct or linear approach (Kaplan, 1966; Hymes, 1967; Cheng, 1987; Yum, 1991). As a result, this difference in communication patterns affects classroom practice on both sides of the Pacific. Students in East Asia tend to employ indirect patterns of communication within the classroom in regards to classroom discussions or relating to the instructor. Reischauer (1977) concluded that the Japanese embrace an indirect pattern of communication because "they have a genuine mistrust of verbal skills, thinking that these tend to show superficiality in contrast to inner, less

articulate feelings that are communicated by innuendo or by nonverbal means" (p. 137).

In contrast, Americans adhere to a direct or linear approach to communication, especially written communication in an academic setting (Kaplan, 1966). When East Asian students employ an indirect pattern of communication in an American university classroom they are oftentimes thought of as indifferent, peculiar, and even strange. The breakdown in cross-cultural communication results from the tendency to judge the classroom behavior of East Asian students based on Western patterns of direct or linear communication. Students educated in American schools, from an early age, are encouraged to be interactive, aggressive, and critical of the text and subject matter in their respective courses. Consequently, it is not only unfair, but also highly inappropriate to impose Western standards of "successful" communication on recently arrived East Asian students. This often results in misconceptions, which exist because ignorance is allowed to persist, even between highly developed and educated societies.

The noted professor of Oriental languages, H.G. Creel (1960) once declared that, "It is not China that is ignorant of or indifferent concerning the culture of the West, but the West that knows almost nothing about China

and makes little attempt to learn. And the West is paying and will continue to pay the price of ignorance" (p. 39). Creel was referring to the fact that most educated East Asians have spent a tremendous amount of time studying the historical and cultural traditions of the West; while the West, in contrast, has nearly ignored the cultural thought patterns of East Asia. Although the body of literature concerning the theory and practice of communication in East Asia has been expanded in the thirty years since Creel penned those words, the consequence of this ignorance has led to innumerable obstacles in communication between the East and West. The results of this obstruction in communication is nowhere more evident than in the educational systems (White, 1987; Robinson, 1991).

Thus, the focus of this paper is two-fold: first, the research will show that fundamental differences exist between the academic cultures of East Asia and the United States; second, the writer will endeavor to demonstrate how ESL teachers can develop effective teaching techniques that will serve to bridge the gap between the academic cultures. It is essential that American educated teachers bridge the cross-cultural communication gap and alleviate the academic culture shock experienced by their East Asian students. This can be achieved through the following

means: first, educate teachers in order to gain an understanding of the communication patterns and academic culture prevalent in East Asia; second, develop culturally sensitive curricula and educational strategies that incorporate the academic culture of East Asian students. Cross-cultural training will in turn help American trained teachers become acquainted with the cultural values and communication patterns, essentially the academic culture, of their East Asian students. As a result, educators will be better equipped to develop and implement educational strategies and teaching techniques that can be incorporated into a culturally-sensitive curriculum and used as a part of classroom practice to enhance the learning process of East Asian students.

Chapter II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CONFUCIAN ORTHODOXY

Confucian orthodoxy stated that the Confucian classics only had one interpretation (Rohlen, 1983; Robinson, 1988). Before proceeding into Confucian-influenced methodology, teaching techniques, and classroom practice, it is necessary to first provide a brief historical overview of Confucian orthodoxy in order for the Western mind to develop an understanding of the primary philosophical traditions that form the foundation of the educational systems throughout East Asia.

Confucius, a name derived by Jesuit missionaries from his original name of Kong Fu Ze, possessed great intellectual ability and, through his rationalistic philosophy, made a significant and lasting contribution to the philosophical and pedagogical systems that form an important part of cultural tradition in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was born a generation before the Buddha in India, and died a decade before the birth of the Greek philosopher Socrates. He was raised in humble circumstances in present-day Shandong province, at the time in Chinese history known

as the Spring and Autumn period, "when the moral and religious authority of the Cho Dynasty (1122-249 B.C.) had begun to collapse and in the absence of the bonds all the states struggled with each other for survival" (Chung, p.38). The historical record indicates that Confucius had little formal education, and being largely self-taught, was from an early age known for his devotion to learning. In addition, Creel (1953) suggests that the experiences associated with his early life gave Confucius a sense of compassion for the common people. Confucius achieved the position of a high civil servant, somewhat equivalent to that of Socrates.

Because of his quest for learning, Confucius later formed a school to develop the mental and moral discipline that he associated with the attainment of knowledge. Creel (1960) suggests that Confucius, as a teacher of mental and moral discipline, became a "transmitter of the Way" (pp. 122-123). Chung (1988) cited Fingarette (1972) in his definition of the "Way" as "the right way of life, the Way of governing, the ideal Way of human existence, the pattern or course of existence that points us to the ideal path of human life" (p. 38). According to Confucius, if people followed the "Way," good moral order could be achieved in society. While Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle took a critical view of the Hellenistic world in

which they lived, Confucius believed that China had once achieved the truly good society and that according to the classics (i.e., the Book of Documents and the Book of Poetry), the ideal society would be achieved when people regained the splendor of earlier dynasties (Chung, 1988, p. 39). As a result, Confucius considered learning as essentially imitating and reproducing the wisdom of the ancients, yet he was unconventional in many of his ideas, such as the thought that any man might become a gentleman or scholar (Waley, 1956, p. 78)). In effect, Confucius denied no one acceptance as a disciple; the only prerequisite being a hunger for knowledge. He once stated, "I never refused to teach anyone who wanted to learn . . . (Analects, VII, p. 7). Consequently, China's great Sage probably did more than anyone in preventing education from becoming the exclusive privilege of the aristocracy (Waley, 1938, p. 7). Confucius promoted the revolutionary idea of universal education centuries before it was to become a reality anywhere in the world.

The teachings of Confucius are essentially a set of practical rules that govern behavior in daily life, "derived from what Confucius saw as the lessons of Chinese history" (Hofstede, 1988). Among the guiding principles of Confucian teaching are social relationships, human benevolence, and moderation. Maintaining proper

relationships is the key to an orderly and stable society. The "wu lun," or five basic relationships, are ruler/subject, father/son, teacher/student, husband/wife, and older brother/younger brother. All these relationships are founded upon cooperation and obligation. For example, it is the duty of the son to respect, honor, and obey his father, just as it is the duty of the subject to obey the ruler. According to Confucius, the family, where social interaction is first learned, is the prototype of all social organizations (Hofstede, 1988). Children learn that individual expression is subject to group expression in order to maintain harmony (Kitao, 1985). Human benevolence, according to the teachings of Confucius, refers to treating others as one would like to be treated. Moderation in all things consists of acquiring skills and education which can benefit society, where one desires to work hard, be patient, and persevere (Hofstede, 1988).

Moreover, Confucius was principally a teacher of pragmatic ethics, realistic and rational in his view of human nature. Max Weber explained that,

> Confucianism is extremely rationalistic since it is bereft of any form of metaphysics and in the sense that it lacks traces of nearly any religious basis. . . . At the same time, it is more realistic than any other system in the sense that it lacks and excludes all measures which are not utilitarian. (quoted by Nakamura, 1964).

One aspect of this rational thought is that Confucianism, in its study in human nature, considers proper relationships as the basis of an orderly society. Confucius, in his teachings on the proper motivations of human nature, set forth four principles from which right conduct arise: jen (humanity), i (faithfulness), li (propriety), and chih (wisdom) (McNaughton, 1974; Chung, 1988). It is these four principles that are at the core of Confucianism, thus dictating the type of conduct which is suitable and equitable in all relationships of a social nature.

The combination of these four qualities, according to Confucius, produces the most desired attribute for a Confucian-influenced person, that of shu (reciprocity). Confucius said, "there has never been a case where a man who did not understand reciprocity was able to communicate to others whatever treasures he might have had stored in himself" (McNaughton, 1974). If reciprocity forms the core of the Confucian ethical system, then li (in Korean ye), the ceremonial propriety, rites, or etiquette, constitutes its outward display; that is, "the behavior of persons related to each other in terms of role, status, rank, and positions in structured society" (Chung, 1988, p. 39). Confucius believed that propriety follows from reciprocity. It is only when an individual returns to

reciprocity, essentially through self-cultivation and self-improvement, that humaneness can be achieved. Self-cultivation, as referred to in the quotation by Confucius at the head of this paper allows one to achieve the ideals of the Confucian teachings. Thus, the primary focus of the philosophy is to turn one's attention inward; an invitation, in a sense, to examine and cultivate oneself, rather than an outward focus which seeks to influence others (Oliver, 1971). Confucius focused his energy upon the individual, for he thought that if a man "cannot put himself aright," over whom he has full control, "how can he hope to succeed in putting others right," over whom he has only partial control (Analects, XIII, 10-13). The means by which to "put oneself aright," according to the Confucian Classics, was through an "extension of knowledge," or more specifically, a devotion to learning (Legge, 1960). This devotion to learning, according to Confucius, marks the primary objective of the great thinker's life and, therefore, constitutes the central theme of Confucian orthodoxy (Mote, 1989). Confucius himself directed most of his attention to the task of learning, and in turn, teaching. As a result, Confucius is said to be the founder of organized education throughout East Asia (Oliver, 1971; Cleverly, 1985; White, 1987).

Consequently, Confucianism has been the official and openly embraced orthodox system of thought in China for more than two millennia. Confucianism has survived as the primary social, political, and educational influence of East Asia. The significance of Confucian orthodoxy throughout East Asia is evidenced in that not only did many of the dynasties of China embrace the philosophy, but the Yi dynasty of Korea adopted it as the official philosophy for 500 years, as did the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan for 250 years (Yum, 1991). The influence of the Confucian Canon can be seen in that it became, for many of the dynastic rulers throughout China's long history, the state philosophy for the determination of governmental policy. The Confucian Canon was employed as the standard of the moral and intellectual examinations, which served the purpose of selecting government officials in many of China's dynasties (Kuo, 1915). Furthermore, the Confucian classics were required reading in the educational systems throughout much of the history of China and for numerous successive generations in Japan and Korea.

As mentioned above, learning, according to the writings of Confucius, essentially entailed copying the ideas, the form, and the way of the ancients (Waley, 1938; Oliver, 1971). This perspective was later reinforced through the many disciples of Confucius, including Mencius

(371-289 B.C.), the most illustrious thinker of the Confucian school. These disciples, and later masters, stressed the appropriateness of ancient models, thus "the study of the Confucian classics became a habit of the student class who held tenaciously to the sayings of the ancient sages" (Kuo, 1915, p. 78). Consequently, the educational systems of East Asia were more concerned with presenting moral precepts than with the advocation of a method of critical thinking (Cleverly, 1985).

Even at the present, the idea that lessons should focus on moral principles remains the traditional function of education throughout East Asia. Cleverly (1985) supports this idea by commenting that the modern-day rulers of China, like their dynastic predecessors before them, "prize education as a means of ordering relations on earth according to a supreme blueprint, and . . . want a schooling devoted to ethical and collective ends. . . ." The emphasis of education in Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong is that it should foster the four basic moral principles, which include love of country, service to others, willingness to abide by the group's decisions, and respect for authority (Unger, 1977).

In addition, the Confucian heritage of Japanese education stresses respect for learning and educational endeavors which lead to personal and societal improvement.

According to Dorfman (1987), the goals of the educational system in Japan include the following: respect for society and established order; valuing group goals above individual interests; diligence and moral commitment; well-organized and disciplined study and work habits; and self-criticism (quoted by Carson, 1992). In this environment, hard work, diligence, and commitment are considered as beneficial to both the individual and society. What Japanese most desire out of life, stability, security, and support, are acquired through effort and commitment; this lesson is stressed from one's youth, both at home and at school (White, 1987). One can see how the words of Confucius resound in the philosophy of education embraced by the Chinese and Japanese alike, "Do not wish for quick results, nor look for small advantages . . . If you are led astray by small advantages, you will never accomplish great things" (Analects, VII, 33).

Chapter III

ACADEMIC CULTURE SHOCK: A DIFFERENCE OF PERCEPTION

The historical background of Confucian orthodoxy provided above allows the Western reader to more fully comprehend the unique differences that exist between the underlying cultural philosophies of the East and West. Given their respective academic cultures, it is evident that students from East Asia will experience certain difficulties upon entering an American classroom; likewise, an American educated teacher will encounter difficulties when confronting the academic culture of East Asia. The underlying philosophies of East Asia and the United States directly affect academic culture both in the patterns of communication and in the ideology concerning groupism vs. individualism.

Communication patterns are just one area in which teacher-student interaction in the classroom differs between East Asia and the West. Responsibility in communication differs between the East and West in who is accountable for successful communication. That is, should the sender or the receiver take responsibility for the correct interpretation of a message. For example,

communication in the United States is considered sender oriented. Meaning is inherent in the message created by the sender, and emphasis is placed on how best to formulate the message, how to improve delivery skills, and how to develop credibility of the source (Yum, 1991). On the other hand, communication in East Asia is receiver oriented, where meaning is in the interpretation. In this context, concentration is on listening, sensitivity, and removal of perception (Cheng, 1987; Hou, 1987). Thus, successful communication in East Asian cultures tends to be the responsibility of the receiver. Lebra (1976) makes reference to what is called "anticipatory communication," in which the burden of communication falls on the message receiver, not on the message sender. This pattern of communication, according to Lebra, is common among Japanese.

In general, the cultures of East Asia tend to place emphasis on a group-oriented society while the culture of the United States advocates a rugged individualism. The group mentality apparent throughout East Asia is based on maintaining social harmony and the obligation to adhere to lasting social norms. As a result, East Asian students are taught to express what is shared by the group rather than personal views or opinions (Duke, 1986, p. 25). Inamoto (1985) explains that expressing the opinion of the

group is based on the Japanese values of "on" (favor) and "giri" (obligation). These cultural values are concerned with meeting group expectations and involve the mutual responsibility of the participants where an emotional connection emphasizes human feelings over logic and reason (pp. 46, 76). An old and infamous Japanese proverb illustrates the point quite clearly, "The nail that sticks out gets knocked down."

On the other hand, the ideology of individualism embraced throughout the history of the United States stresses personal independence, fierce competition, and a striving for uniqueness. In contrast to the homogeneous societies of East Asia, America typifies a unique heterogeneous society in which the concepts of individualism and competition are interwoven into the very fabric of its culture. Varenne (1991) shows that as early as the 1830's, the famous French social philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, believed that individualism was the most notable characteristic of American culture (p. 53). The spirit of individualism is the overwhelming principle that regulates the interaction of relationships in American society.

Consequently, East Asian students experience a peculiar kind of culture shock related to their immersion into Western academia. This "academic culture shock"

results from the perceptions and expectations of East Asian students which are in sharp contrast to the typical classroom practices of the West. More specifically, academic culture shock is the result of fundamental differences in the educational systems of East Asia and the West.

East Asian Classroom Practice

With Confucian orthodoxy providing the cornerstone of the educational systems of East Asia, classroom practice advocates teacher-centric instruction in which rote learning tends to be the most widely accepted approach (Maley, 1986; Kuo, 1915; Erbaugh, 1990). Almost all teaching is whole group, especially after primary level and in early secondary levels, and instruction tends to be quite regimented, including the use of drills, with an emphasis on memorization (Unger, 1977). Moreover, choral recitation is often used, with particular attention paid to diction, enunciation, and self-confidence in speaking and performing (Carson, 1992). Students are encouraged to become proficient in their oral skills in order to be productive members of society; this is especially true in China.

Historically, Confucian-influenced classrooms in East Asia generally restricted or treated with disapproval originality, individual initiative, and inventiveness

(Oliver, 1971). The structure and order of society as a whole was perceived as more important than the whims and fancies of an individual at any given moment. Reischauer (1977) suggests that cooperativeness and understanding of others are the most admired virtues in East Asian cultures; likewise, group consensus is highly regarded, while displays of self-assertedness are considered as evidence of immaturity (p. 135). As a result, students in East Asian classrooms strive to keep equality among their peers, preferring to maintain the harmony of the group. This results in an interesting method of turn taking among the teacher and students in the East Asian classroom. For example, turn taking behavior consists of eye movement, with the teacher responding by nodding his/her head. This is a more indirect and less conspicuous style of communication, allowing students to volunteer information without feeling threatened and not disrupting the harmony of the group (Kitao, 1985).

Moreover, the lasting cultural traditions of China, Japan, and Korea placed emphasis upon detail, precision, and exactness, both in the microcosm of the school and the macrocosm of society, again because the cultures of East Asia traditionally placed a higher value on conformity to societal norms and group consensus than on individual subjectivism (Nakamura, 1964). Students in

Confucian-influenced classrooms were expected to copy in exact form, with emphasis upon detail, the notes from the text written on the blackboard by the teacher. In fact, it is a common practice in Korean elementary schools that classroom notes are extracted entirely from the textbook (Robinson, 1991).

In addition, questions from the students, often viewed as a challenge to the position and authority of the teacher, are not a typical part of classroom behavior. Rather, questions, used for the purpose of formal instruction, are the responsibility and the duty of the teacher. For example, it is not uncommon, especially at higher levels, for the teacher to ask a rhetorical question, then provide the answer; students diligently copy both the question and the answer in their notebooks (Robinson, 1988, 1982). Students are expected to memorize both the question and the answer even when meaning is not understood. In this context, critical thinking is reserved only for those teachers who have mastered the Confucian classics. The teacher, according to Confucian precepts, always commands the respect of the students, both in and outside the classroom. This is evidenced in the third of the "Ten Commandments" as put forth by more recent Confucianists: "Thou shalt not forget about the

dignity of teachers or show signs of ingratitude" (Hsu, 1967).

American Classroom Practice

In contrast, the modern American classroom is marked by the pursuit of self-actualization and self-awareness, thought by many educators as a crucial part of the learning process. These concepts can perhaps best be seen in speech. Americans generally express themselves as the center of nature, while East Asians tend to express themselves as a part of nature (Kitao, 1985). Modern teaching methods strongly encourage critical thinking on the part of students. Learning tends to be student-centric in which students are responsible to direct, and thus take control of the learning process (Hsu, 1981). It is primarily regarded as the students' responsibility to learn the material presented in any particular course. Lectures sometimes do not even make reference to texts which are designated as required reading.

In addition, course grades are partially given in direct relation to student participation during class time, which often includes a large amount of verbal activity in both small group and whole class activities (Duke, 1986; Rohlen, 1983). Verbal activity in university classes in the United States take the form of questions,

discussion, persuasion, and even argumentation, and is strongly encouraged, especially at higher levels. On the other hand, direct forms of argumentation and debate are often discouraged in East Asian classrooms because of the position of the teacher and the role of philosophy and religion (Becker, 1986). It is felt that the emphasis on verbal activity in American classrooms is rooted in the main function of communication, which is to assert individualism, actualize autonomy, and achieve self-fulfillment (Reischauer, 1977).

Furthermore, the role of the teacher in the American educational system tends to be that of facilitator in the learning process. The instructor, at nearly all levels of education, serves as a resource person whose primary function is to stimulate, facilitate, and challenge each student to achieve individual potential (Maley, 1986). Moreover, students are taught to look within, search themselves, and trust their own instincts in order to enhance creativity and develop originality throughout the learning process. Teachers endeavor to create a classroom environment where learning is active, interesting, and fun. This description of classroom practice in the United States stands in sharp contrast to the function of the East Asian "master" who has been entrusted with passing on the moral precepts of the Confucian classics in the

precise way that the educational system has dictated for over two millennia (Waley, 1938). Teaching methods throughout East Asia stress the development and nourishing of group solidarity in the classroom (Duke, 1986). It is little wonder why East Asian students would experience "academic culture shock" upon entering an American classroom in which student behavior entails asking questions, discussing points of view, and expressing personal opinion where critical thinking is emphasized and creativity is stressed as an important part of the learning process.

Chapter IV

MISCONCEPTIONS

The contrast between the philosophy of education in East Asian countries and that of the United States causes a variety of expectations for both the East Asian student and the American trained teacher concerning the learning process. These expectations are often polarized. The stark contrast between the educational philosophies of the East and West often results in misconceptions concerning the classroom behavior of East Asian students.

According to studies done in several universities in California, Asian American students were found to be more verbally reticent than their Anglo counterparts. Suzuki (1985) suggests that this was partly due to East Asian cultural norms, but the nonverbal tendency was strongly reinforced through the misconceptions and prejudice of American professors (p. 209). Misconceptions arise out of an unfamiliarity and a lack of understanding between academic cultures. They persist because of the tendency to judge the behavior of East Asian students based on cultural standards of Western orthodoxy. Some of the common misconceptions concerning East Asian students is

that they are unwilling to participate in classroom activities and discussions; they simply do not understand (or they are dumb); they have no personal opinion; they force a mechanical response; and they do not appreciate individual initiative (Robinson, 1991). As a result, destructive stereotypes are fostered which in turn limit the potential of students from East Asian countries. It is therefore crucial that teachers, especially those in ESL and bilingual education, receive training in the academic culture of East Asia which in turn influences classroom practice.

Expectations of East Asian Students

The perceptions and expectations of East Asian students are based on their Confucian-influenced academic culture. As a result, East Asian students enter the American classroom with an expectation of teacher-centric instruction in which the instructor teaches at a regular, even pace, teaching the group as a whole (Duke, 1986). Students follow the lecture in identical textbooks, always on the same page. The East Asian teacher "makes a Herculean effort to keep the whole class progressing in concert" (Duke, 1986, p.28). Thus, in many East Asian classrooms, the teacher directs her lesson to all students while standing at the front of the class, using questions and examples for explanation and clarification. If

questions are asked by the teacher, the East Asian student carries an expectation that the teacher will either call on the student by name in order to answer the question or will provide the answer, such as in the case of rhetorical questions. Moreover, students understand that questions normally have only one correct answer, and the teacher will not accept other answers as true in part. Furthermore, if a question is directed to a particular student, the expectation is that the student addressed should be allowed "sufficient" time by the teacher and the other students to search for the best way to express meaning (Robinson, 1990).

Moreover, the East Asian student comes to the Western classroom with a strong background in a prescriptive rather than descriptive approach to language instruction (Robinson, 1991). This is coupled with a preference for a teaching method that is repeated with little variety. East Asian students prefer a textbook for reference and memorization and expect the use of a notebook to record information presented in class by the teacher (Duke, 1986). Other cultural traits, such as a reluctance to make eye contact with the teacher, surprise when called upon or asked to participate, and embarrassment (loss of face) when unable to answer a question all result from the

Confucian-influenced cultural philosophies inherent in the classrooms of East Asia.

Expectations of American Trained Teachers

American trained teachers have expectations concerning teaching methodology and classroom practice that are in many cases diametrically opposed to those cited above concerning the East Asian student. Generally, teachers in the United States treat each student as an individual with unique talents and abilities. With this in mind, teachers strive to encourage each student to take responsibility and direct their own learning process. For example, in a typical American elementary classroom, students in a reading classroom would normally be divided into homogeneously groups depending upon reading proficiency. The teacher would circulate among the reading groups, providing as much personal attention as needed by individual students, yet allowing groups the freedom to direct the learning process. At various times throughout the semester, the teacher would move students from one group to another if progress is achieved (Duke, 1986). This philosophy of teaching stands in stark contrast to the methods employed by the East Asian teacher where a keen sense of group loyalty is consciously developed, and where teachers do not readily accept the

American innovations of the open classroom or team teaching (Rohlen, 1983).

Moreover, standard ESL classroom practice in America tends to focus on process-oriented teaching which incorporates a strong component of freewriting, brainstorming, or role play in order to better convey the lesson, emphasizing hands-on experience among the students. Because of the inherent ideology of individualism described above, American teachers try to encourage students to express real opinions, sometimes playing the devil's advocate in order to stimulate debate. East Asian students, however, tend to reject these practices as "playful wastes of time" (Erbaugh, 1990). Moreover, American trained teachers, and students alike, think little of questioning the text, often criticizing parts of the text that are controversial. In the context of higher learning institutions, free speech, the ability to express individual opinion, and the freedom to question those in authority, whether the text or the teacher, is viewed as a basic right. This is clearly in diametrical opposition to the exalted position of the model text in the East Asian setting. Throughout East Asia, the model even outweighs the position of the teacher. For example, Chinese texts are ordained by the State Commission of

Education, thus teachers who criticize textbooks are viewed as naive or subversive (Erbaugh, 1990).

Chapter V

SUGGESTIONS FOR ESL TEACHERS

Accordingly, as part of the educational process mentioned above, ESL teachers should become well acquainted with the cultural values, communication patterns, and academic cultures of their East Asian students. The following are four suggestions that would assist teachers in this cross-cultural learning process. 1) Appreciation for native culture of students. This can be done, for instance, through simply going to the home of the ESL student or attending a festival such as the Chinese or Vietnamese New Year celebration. 2) Heightened Awareness of East Asian philosophical traditions. This can be achieved through a knowledge of the concepts presented above and through a willingness to discover for oneself the differences that exist in educational philosophies. 3) Develop an understanding of the academic culture of East Asia. American trained teachers can become familiar with the teaching methodologies and classroom practices prevalent in East Asia through exploring a variety of books and articles found in the bibliography at the end of this work. 4) Reserve judgment

until there is further interaction, both verbal and written, with the student. Be careful not to "label" the student based on initial behavior. It might be valuable in some cases to carry out additional diagnostic tests or interviews with the student and his or her family before making any final assessment. These four simple suggestions, if carried through, would not only assist teachers in their efforts to help East Asian students overcome cross-cultural academic shock, but would also go a long way in building bridges between academic cultures, destroying the destructive misconceptions and stereotypes that persist out of ignorance.

Chapter VI

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

It is necessary for educators to develop and implement teaching strategies and techniques that could be incorporated into a culturally-sensitive curriculum and used as a part of classroom practice:

1) Research has shown that East Asian students will often make direct eye contact with the teacher when they know the answer to a question. ESL teachers can use this concept to empower their students and build self-esteem.
2) Address the student individually, by name, when asking a question. This is viewed more as one-to-one communication thus allowing the student to respond more easily.
3) Emphasize the relativity of many questions; that is, there may not necessary be only one correct answer. Thus, the student should be encouraged to reply from personal experience and cultural background knowledge.
4) Develop individual and group projects that utilize the vast reservoir of personal experience of the

East Asian students. For example, every international student has some experience with culture shock, intercultural communication, or cultural adjustment. Use these experiences to improve the students' oral, written, and comprehension skills.

5) Incorporate written exercises whenever possible, even within a strictly oral assignment, as this individualizes the "task," allowing the student to express her opinion more freely. East Asian students are more likely to feel the freedom to share personal opinions in a written exercise as compared to a classroom discussion context.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, fundamental differences exist in the educational systems and teaching philosophies of East Asia and the West, manifesting in a wide variety of contrasting classroom practices. These differences often result in "academic culture shock" experienced by many East Asian students upon entering the American classroom. However, differences between the academic cultures of the East and West should be kept in perspective. Oliver (1971) reminds us to accept the challenge of these differences "not as barriers to understanding but as invitations to inquiry" (p. 6). Indeed, the challenge for all educators is that bridges of understanding can be constructed that will serve to integrate and unite two seemingly incongruous academic cultures. Kim (1985) denotes clearly and concisely the vision for ESL professionals, "our task is to find our human unity and simultaneously to express diversity" (p. 407).

Moreover, cross-cultural academic shock can be alleviated when American teachers allow themselves to become acquainted with the cultural values and

communication patterns, essentially the academic culture, of their East Asian students. Lastly, it is necessary for educators to develop and implement educational strategies and teaching techniques that can be incorporated into a culturally-sensitive curriculum and used as part of classroom practice to enhance the learning process of their East Asian students.

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